

Restoring African Women to History:
A History of Pre-Colonial East African Baganda Women
A Senior Project
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by
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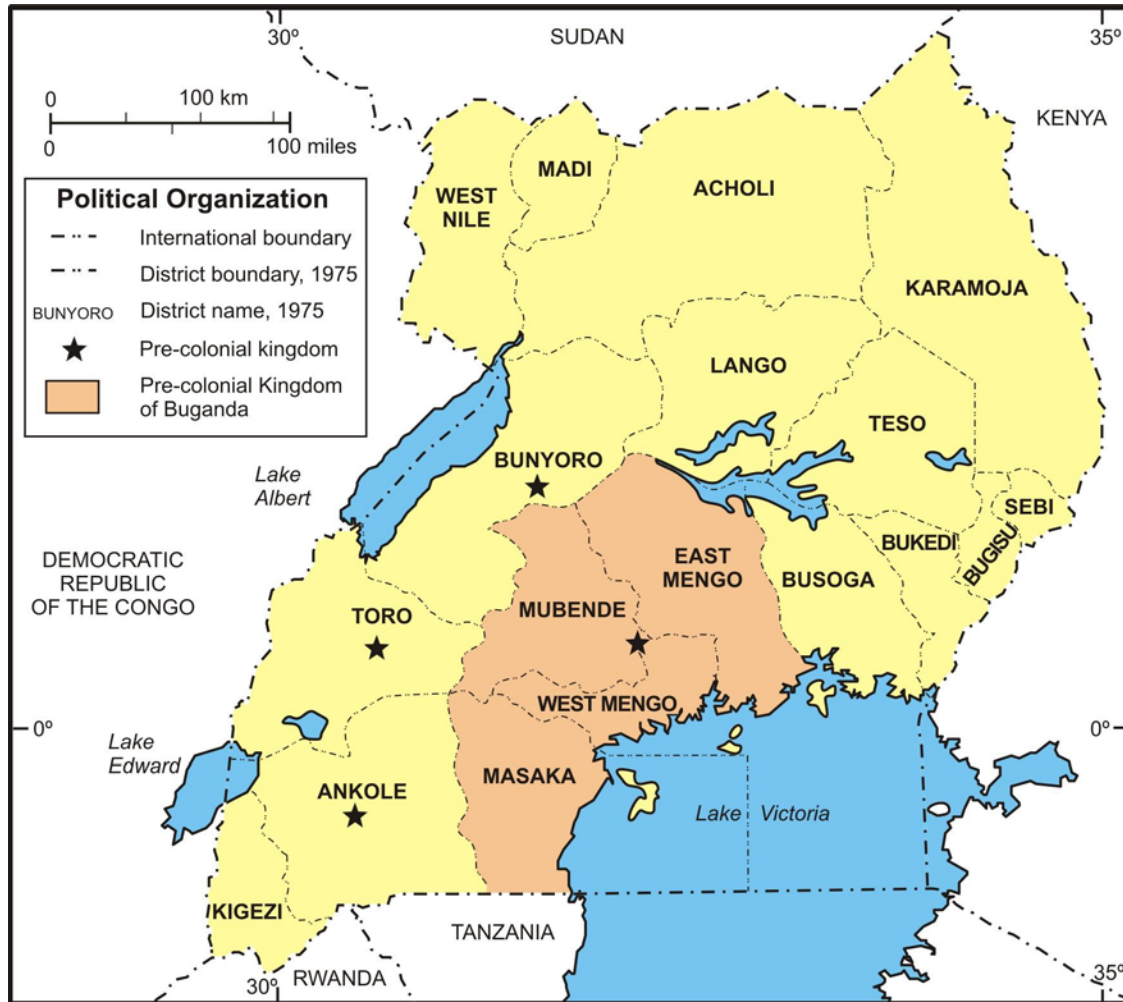


Figure 1. The Kingdoms of Uganda, 1800s to 1900s. I will interchangeably use the words Ganda, Baganda and Buganda to refer to the Buganda Kingdom. Source: nationsonline.org.

Not since the days of the Roman Empire has a single nation carried out so great a responsibility for the lives of men and women born outside her shores as Great Britain does today. Within her forty or so dependent territories dwell eighty million people for whose welfare and enlightenment Britain is, to a greater or lesser degree, answerable. Look where you will, you will find that the British have ended wars, put a stop to savage customs, opened churches, schools, and hospitals, built railways, roads and harbors, and developed the natural resources of the countries so as to mitigate the almost universal poverty. They have given freely in money and materials and in the services of a devoted band of civil servants; yet no tax is imposed upon any of the colonial peoples that is not spent by their own governments on projects for their own good. – Harold Ingram, *Uganda* (1960)¹

In his narrative, colonial administrator Harold Ingram describes the perspective that many missionaries and colonial executives held towards the African peoples. The notion of the ‘White man’s burden’ to save the world from uncivilized, and animalistic customs coupled with the theory of Africa as the Dark Continent, is one of the main reasons why early explorers and missionaries placed women in subordinate positions. This move thus overlooked the critical significance of contributions that pre-colonial African women contributed to the political, economic and social developmental structure in African communities. Missionary C.W. Hattersley confirmed the same notion towards pre-colonial Baganda women when he jotted in his 1908 book, *The Baganda at home*, that Ganda

¹Harold Ingram. *Uganda: A Crisis of Nationhood* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1960), vii.

women had invariably occupied a place of subordination in society.² Thus African women's history was either overlooked or placed in positions of inferiority in preference for their male counterparts.

Furthermore, the pre-colonial historiography of African women is abstract and not localized due to insufficient written sources. The historiography of pre-colonial African societies written by male Arabs during the 900s before the arrival of Europeans oversimplified women as a subservient group whose primary responsibility was childbearing.³ As African historians Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsab explained, "the little information available about African women from the colonial period presented them as victims of Africa's social and cultural institutions and a group with no voice or agency."⁴ Historians wishing to study the historiography of pre-colonial East Africa have lamented over the poor source material pertaining to pre-colonial East African women. The lack of primary documents on the subject matter has undermined pre-colonial East African women's place within modern historiographical studies.

Also, to the problem of inadequate information inhibiting comprehensive historical inquiry, is the disproportionately male-dominated historical narrative, which has degraded the integrity of pre-colonial East African women studies. Missionaries motivated by aims of colonization and Christianization recorded much of the historiography about pre-colonial East African women. The information documented by missionaries centered around men, the elite, and their influence on society. Missionaries and early explorers not

² C.W. Hattersley, *The Baganda at Home: With One Hundred Pictures of Life and Work in Uganda* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1908), 92.

³ Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsab, *Women's Roles through History: Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood LLC, 2012), 1.

⁴ Falola and Amponsab, *Women's Roles through History*, 2.

only overlooked the significant contributions of pre-colonial African women in establishing their communities, but also undermined their autonomy by positioning them in roles of subordination. In her book, *In the Praise of Black Women*, historian Simone Schwartz-Bart gives an account of the complexity of studying pre-colonial African women:

Black women have been central to the development of humankind since its inception. Whether one traces humanity's origins back to the biblical Eve or anthropological Lucy, the roots of human existence lead back to Africa and to African women. Despite this fact, black women have either been completely written out of history or have had their roles so trivialized as to make them appear to be insignificant.⁵

Schwartz-Bart recapitulates the abhorrent trend of historical investigation plaguing pre-colonial East African women's history, which usurps the perspective and influence of women is supported by insufficient sources. Everywhere one looks in pre-colonial African women's historiography black women are characterized by racial assumptions or scholarly neglect.⁶

While attempts to restore pre-colonial East African women to a place of prominence in the historical investigation has been on the rise, much more work needs to be done to achieve this goal. The coming of the twentieth century has marked a shift in historical investigations, specifically within African history. Taking into account the influence, perspective, and role of women has been revitalized. This study has predominantly comprised of Western, Southern, and Northern pre-colonial African

⁵ Simone Schwartz-Bart, *In Praise of Black Women* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), vii.

⁶ Schwartz-Bart, *In Praise of Black Women*, vii.

societies.⁷ Furthermore, Ogbomo and Ogbomo, authors of “Women and Society in Pre-colonial Iyede,” contend that “as feminist studies became popular, the focus shifted to showing that although African women have a history, they have always been oppressed.”⁸ Ogbomo and Ogbomo explain that this theory is strengthened by a tendency to view history backward; the assumption is that if African women occupy an oppressed position in modern history, thus they must have been subjugated in the past.⁹ This paper will combat the historical myth of oppression surrounding the study of pre-colonial African women’s history. I will illustrate that subjection did not come about until after colonial period when African women lost power and economic autonomy to men.

The historical narrative that dominates the current understanding of pre-colonial East African women’s history written by missionaries, excluded the importance, contributions, and significant roles propagated by the women, who were an integral part of society. These early explorers including Bishop Alfred Tucker, and Reverend John Roscoe, among others, landed on the shores of Lake Victoria during the 20th century.¹⁰ There, they were perplexed by the barbaric and primitive “Dark Continent” theory held by many Europeans towards Africans during this period.¹¹ In his book, *The Baganda, Their Customs and Beliefs*, Reverend John Roscoe conveys the depiction of women that solidified their role

⁷ O.W. Ogbomo and Q.O. Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” *Anthropos Institut*, Volume 88, Number 4/6 (1993), 431-441.

⁸ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 431-441.

⁹ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 431-441.

¹⁰ Alfred Robert Tucker, *Eighteen Years In Uganda and East Africa* (Westport, Conn: Negro University Press, 1970), 1.

¹¹ John Roscoe, *The Soul of Central Africa: A General Account of the Mackie Ethnological Expedition* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), viii.

as secondary citizens. Roscoe argues that women were viewed as domestic resources, which unilaterally held importance in their role of domesticity.¹²

Missionaries and early explorers with objectives of colonization and Christianization did not take into consideration the contributions, and significant roles propagated by women in the economic development of the Ganda Kingdom. Explorers with the motivation of extending the British Empire deemed some the customs and practices of the African people primitive and backgrounds. Therefore giving Europeans grounds to colonize and exploit the continent of Africa.

In analyzing the customs of the Ganda people, John Roscoe noted that he did so “for the purposes of collecting information about the people, in order to determine which primitive customs to get rid off and hence pave a way for the extension of the British Empire and civilization.”¹³ Missionaries hoped that the information accumulated about pre-colonial societies would accelerate the colonial process in Eastern Africa. Roscoe added that “for the missionary a right understanding of primitive beliefs is essential, for he should be able to distinguish between the customs which must be ruthlessly destroyed and those which contain germ of truth capable of development.”¹⁴ The perspective of viewing the customs of the natives as barbaric, and primitive laid a foundation for early explorers to place women in subsidiary positions. The barbaric and primitive outlook on prehistory African societies contributed women’s loss of economic power and autonomy after

¹² John Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs* (New York, Barnes & Noble Inc.,1966), 94-95.

¹³ Roscoe, *The Soul of Central Africa*, viii.

¹⁴ Roscoe, *The Soul of Central Africa*, viii.

colonization; this perspective continued through the historical study of African women until the 1960s.¹⁵

Contrary to Roscoe's promulgation, I will argue that the agricultural and domestic responsibilities assigned to women functioned beyond the domestication of women, by being an integral part of the overall success of economic wealth, and prosperity of the Kingdom at large. The intention of this historical investigation is to illustrate the interaction and mutual influence between women and pre-colonial history.

To accomplish the conveyance of an interconnected history, I will study the pre-colonial historiography of East African women with a primary focus on the Buganda Kingdom. I will provide analysis on how women aided in stimulating the economic, social, and political development of the pre-colonial Buganda Kingdom by taking on the very roles that promulgated explorers to reckon women as ineffectual and inconsequential.

¹⁵ Schwartz-Bart, *In Praise of Black Women*, vii.

Geographical Background of the Ganda Kingdom



Figure 2. Village typical Ganda women engaged in daily work. 1950. Source: visituganda.com

The geographical features of the Buganda Kingdom captured the hearts of several early European explorers and missionaries. It was this magnificent landscape that prompted explorer John Hanning Speke to call Uganda the “Pearl of Africa.” In his journal, colonial explorer Harold Ingram gave an analysis of the geographical topography of the Buganda Kingdom, comparing it to the summer climate in England. Harold admired the beauty of Ganda Kingdom with Lake Victoria as its primary characteristic, calling it:

quite a nice country with perhaps just a little too much water. But there are also its mountains, such as snow-topped Ruwenzori, the mountains of the moon, in the west, and the great mountain Elgon in the east, Although it is on

the equator, Uganda has a very English-summer-at-its-best climate. The rainfall is not exaggerated but is enough to keep the country lush and green all the year around.¹⁶

Buganda's location on the Lake Victoria provided it with an abundance of rainfall, fertile soils, which helped the kingdom's agricultural growth, and thus fostered its military and political expansion during the nineteenth century. Before the Ganda took political power in the eighteenth century, the Bunyoro-Kitala situated along lake Albert was the dominant and largest Kingdom in the region.¹⁷ The death of the Bunyoro leader *Mukama* Chwa I led to a decline in the political power of the Kingdom.¹⁸ Around the period of 1820 to 1890, the Buganda Kingdom under *Kabaka* (King) Mwanga pursued a policy of territorial and military expansion; expanding northwest and conquering neighboring Kingdoms like the Busoga.¹⁹ *Kabaka* Juuju who succeeded Mwanga also carried out military campaigns, that extended the Ganda political power throughout, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and other neighboring Kingdoms.²⁰ Conquered Kingdoms entered into a tributary system with the Ganda.

With the death of their leader coupled with an inadequate centralized system, the Banyoro entered into a tributary system with the Baganda.²¹ Thus, the eighteenth century marked the beginning of the Ganda Empire. The Ganda Kingdom stretched along the

¹⁶ Ingram. *Uganda: A Crisis of Nationhood*, 3.

¹⁷ Robert Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1986), 83.

¹⁸ Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History*, 84.

¹⁹ Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History*, 85.

²⁰ Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History*, 86.

²¹ Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History*, 86-87.

equator with seasonal variations of the wind, rainfall, and humidity year round.²² Richard Reid's examination of the geographical location of the kingdom provides a precise placement of the geographical location of the kingdom of Buganda and its relation to the territorial and political expansion during the nineteenth century. According to Richard Reid, author of *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*,

Buganda was located on the southern shores of Lake Victoria, which enabled the Kingdom to receive an abundance of rainfall, particularly in months of February, June, October and December. This facilitated the Kingdom to maintain fertile soils suitable for agriculture and growing different kinds of crops.²³

The scenery in the Ganda Kingdom was much more verdant than its neighbors. The landscape was, still is, of Savannah vegetation with rugged mountainous scenery, enwreathed by a free flow of various rivers and lakes.²⁴ Recognition of the geographical landscape and location of the Buganda Kingdom is crucial to understanding the basis of the Kingdom's territorial political augmentation during the nineteenth century. Because women were the primary agriculturalists in pre-colonial Buganda, they occupied a significant role in the economic and political expansion of the Kingdom.

Similarly to Reid, scholar Kiwanuka Semakula, attributes the benefit of Buganda's geographical location to its agricultural and militaristic and development capabilities. He asserts that "Buganda had been blessed by geography, situated on the southern shores of the largest inland lake in Africa, she had the advantages of good soils, adequate and reliable

²² Kiwanuka Semakula, *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972), 149.

²³ Richard Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 32.

²⁴ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 31.

rainfall, and abundant sunshine.”²⁵ Buganda’s geographical location required a high production in agriculture to sustain the kingdom and its people. The kingdom’s territorial expansion relied on the fact that it had a solid agricultural foundation. Since they were at the center of food production, pre-colonial Ganda women occupied a pivotal agricultural function, which facilitated the economic and political expansion of the Kingdom. Women’s responsibility as agriculturalists permitted men to participate in other activities such as bark cloth making, war, carpentry, civil service for the King, and blacksmithing.²⁶

Furthermore, in examining the historiography of the kingdom’s foundation, one finds that women played a significant role in the founding of the Ganda Kingdom. The oral narratives of the Kingdom attribute a mysterious figure *Kintu* as the founding father of the Buganda Kingdom. As Reid explains,

Kintu was presumed to have brought to Buganda the first banana root and sweet potato as well as various livestock, perhaps the most valuable socio-economic asset that Kintu brought with him was wife- Nambi. Together they established the Kingdom of Buganda by building a strong agricultural economy, Kintu’s reign is synonymous to agricultural influence.²⁷

The history of Kintu’s migration to Buganda, similar to that of Baganda’s neighboring Kingdom Bunyoro-Kitala, ends with a myth of Kintu disappearing.²⁸ Kintu’s reign and Kingdom building laid a precedent for the significance of women in the Ganda Kingdom. Kintu’s wife, *Nambi*, was an asset to him, her existence facilitated the agricultural

²⁵ Semakula, *A History of Buganda*, 149.

²⁶ Semakula, *A History of Buganda*, 149.

²⁷ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 25.

²⁸ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 26.

expansion of the Kingdom. Thus, it is clear that women were an essential resource for their husbands and society.

Women and the Economic Structure

This section examines how women exercised notable influence in the economic developmental structure of the Buganda Kingdom; by taking on the very roles that were depicted as insignificant and overlooked by early European explorers. Colonial rule in East African countries similar to West Africa marked the end of equality of men and women in rural and urban areas in economics and politics.²⁹ In 1908, colonial administrator C.W. Hattersley noted in his journal that, pre-colonial Ganda women occupied a subservient position in society and that they were beneath men in standard intellectual capacity.³⁰ Contrary to Hattersley's promulgation, in analyzing the pre-colonial economic structure of the Buganda Kingdom, the typical Ganda women similar to their Banyoro-kitala neighbors worked alongside the men. Women assisted their husbands in all types of economic activities; during agricultural season, while the men cleared the fields for planting season, women engaged in digging, planting and harvesting. In examining the economic structure of the Baganda kingdom, one finds that women interacted with their societies and environments, and thus, became a visible part of the economic structure.

Agriculture was by far the most important occupation of the Ganda Kingdom. Throughout the Kingdoms of Uganda, Banyoro-kitala, Banyankole, Bagesu, Batoro, among others, women's agricultural labor was essential to the economic growth of their

²⁹ Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Women In Africa; Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 55.

³⁰ Hattersley, *The Baganda At Home*, 92.

Kingdoms, even within societies like the Banyankole that owned cattle. Women cultivated yams, cassava, plantain, sweet potatoes, semsem, groundnuts, maize, beans, peas, millet, coffee, cotton, and different types of vegetables and fruits. These very roles caused Ganda women to get overlooked in earliest documentation; in most cases, women's efforts in farming and domesticity were recorded as acts of inferiority. In 1911, Reverend John Roscoe illustrated the economic contributions of Baganda women when he recorded in his Journal that,

Peasant wives held large plantain gardens to keep in order, and cooking to do, and frequently they assisted their husbands in preparing building materials for the work demanded of them by their chiefs. The women cut and cleaned reeds; they also cut the grass for thatching; they weeded the roads; and they carried food into the capital for their husbands' chief. Their leisure time they filled with basket- and mat-making.³¹

Women were constantly working to improve the lives of their families and economic developmental structure of the Kingdom. The principal and primary duty of the wife was not just to cultivate food or cooking, as noted by several early explorers and missionaries, however her responsibilities involved working alongside her husband to make sure the economy ran smoothly. Buganda women - just like their Bunyoro-kitala counterparts - took on the responsibility of keeping the family supplied with food and feed satisfactorily. In 1923, Reverend Roscoe noted in his journal that among the Bunyoro-kitala, "the whole care of growing the crop rested upon the wife, for the husband had work to do for the chief, who might make him build for him, or herd his sheep and goats, or might send him to build for

³¹ Roscoe, *The Baganda, Their Customs and Beliefs*, 95.

the king or to go out to war.”³² Similar to the Bunyoro-Kitala, pre-colonial Ganda women provided the central economic support for the family. They took on the responsibility of cultivating the plantation, which, as Reid explains, “was the source of labor, on both a local and national scale; of production and reproduction; of the surplus which drove the exchange of the economy.”³³ This enabled the Buganda to dominate the long distance trade and fostered the outward territorial expansion of the Kingdom in the eighteenth century.³⁴

Unfortunately, these very roles of cultivation, which contributed to the territorial expansion of the Ganda kingdom, caused women to be overlooked, unrecognized, and their positions so degraded, that they were regarded as secondarily citizens to their male counterparts. European explorers ignored that; division of labor enabled the Kingdom to run smoothly. Women’s agricultural labor division enabled men to go hunting, engage in civil service, and war. This in turn, accommodated for the conquering neighboring kingdoms. Thus expanding the territorial boundaries of the Kingdom; so much so, that at the eve of European colonization, the Ganda were the strongest and most revered Kingdom in Uganda. The division of labor was evident in neighboring Kingdoms like the Bunyoro-Kitala as well. John Roscoe accounted for the division of labor when he noted that, among the Bunyoro-Kitala, the men also “cleared fields, tall grass and bushes; they burnt the reeds and grass but left the wood for firewood for the women to collect.”³⁵ When the fields were dry enough to start planting, women took on the responsibility of sowing seeds, and food

³² Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 25.

³³ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 25.

³⁴ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 25.

³⁵ John Roscoe, *The Bakitala or Banyoro* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1923), 201.

crops, while some men went to serve the needs of the king.³⁶ Noticeably women and men worked together to cultivate food through systematic division of labor in order to advance economic growth. According to Roscoe,

the plantains grow so freely that a women can supply the needs of her family with a minimum of labor, and with the bark cloth trees a man can supply their clothing. The country had all its needs supplied by its own products for many years, and the people were happy and healthy before the introduction of Western civilization.³⁷

It is evident that women were not limited to agricultural and domestic roles, rather they enjoyed economic autonomy before colonization. But we should exercise caution when taking into account Roscoe's analysis, he often contradicts himself in some of his writings, sometimes he praises Ganda pre-colonial society, as when he notes that the Baganda were more sophisticated than their neighbors, in fact the only ethnic group among the Bantu people in East Africa that did not practice mutilation of the body or any kind of scarifications.³⁸ At other times he seems to condemn the cultural practices of the people, like when he contends that, the practices of the people be ruthless destroyed in order to pave a way for christianization and colonization.³⁹

Nonetheless his analysis embeds the division of labor in pre-colonial Ganda society, where women were not subordinate to men, but instead worked alongside men through a

³⁶ Roscoe, *The Bakitala or Banyoro*, 201. "[W]hen the ground had been cleared, the woman dug it and probably put in some fast growing crop, such as sweet potatoes, maize, or dwarf beans, in order to get food as soon as possible."

³⁷ Roscoe, *The Baganda Their Customs and Beliefs*, 5.

³⁸ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 5.

³⁹ Roscoe, *The Soul of Central Africa*, ix.

labor-structured hierarchy system that brought about Kingdom economic growth and outward territorial expansion.

Furthermore, it is also crucial to note that during the 1800s when most European explorers were recording these documents, women in Britain were considered to be inferior to men.⁴⁰ Therefore, as they wrote about pre-colonial African societies, these British men would not ever have thought to elevate the women to the status of men. The British explorers and missionaries had to place the women of Africa in subservient occupations in order to justify their dream of colonization. In other words, these women badly needed the British to “civilize” them and their entire society.

Ganda women also asserted economic independence through the production of arts. Basket weaving, bead making, and pottery were among the many artistic activities those women engaged in to assert economic independence. As explained by Falola and Amponsab,

African women have historically served as architects and transmitters of Africa’s social and cultural symbolism and ritual meanings, but more importantly, their artistic performance has had significant economic impact not only in their lives and in the lives of their families but also in their communities as well.⁴¹

Weaving baskets and mats was a very important skill to have in the Ganda society. Mats were used as beddings and furniture, while baskets were used during market trading and storage. Basket weaving was made using young wild palm leaves and banana fiber.⁴²

⁴⁰ Louis A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1978), 6.

⁴¹ Falola and Amponsab, *Women’s Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 133.

⁴² Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

Basket weaving was mainly common among the peasants who sold their finished product at the village market through a medium of exchange with their neighboring kingdoms.

Peasant women whose husbands had deceased or called to civil service, used basket weaving as a means to earn products that they lacked.

Additionally women whose plantations had suffered a drought also turned to basket weaving to sustain their families.⁴³ Both urban and rural pre-colonial women in Ganda society used basket weaving as a means of economic independence.⁴⁴ Likewise, Falola and Amponsab explain, “women have historically been the predominant producers of basketry.”⁴⁵ Basket making was part of the many activities that women incorporated within husbandry and homestead responsibilities.⁴⁶

In addition to basket weaving, beads were also produced by women and used within the domestic sphere. Women used beads during birth, marriage, public rituals and were able to sell their finished products at the local market and with neighboring kingdoms.⁴⁷ According to Reid, when Reverend Roscoe encountered women engaging in the local market he noted this as a sign of male subordination and oppression.⁴⁸ Reid explains that, “Roscoe clearly viewed the selling of baskets by women as symptomatic of a male dominated society, and an example of the manner in which women were essentially marginalized in economic activity.”⁴⁹ Roscoe was overshadowed by the view of women in Britain during the 1800s, where women were inferior to men. Therefore he concluded that

⁴³ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

⁴⁴ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

⁴⁵ Falola and Amponsab, *Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 124.

⁴⁶ Falola and Amponsab, *Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 124.

⁴⁷ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

⁴⁸ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

⁴⁹ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

African women engaging in economic activities in the market place was a sign of male suppression of women. Reid cautions African historians to be careful when placing pre-history women in areas of subjugation,

we need to exercise caution in our evaluation of the role of women and to be aware that there many have been many other less obvious ways in which women worked the system to their advantage. The fact that they do not loom large in the relevant source is frustrating for historians who would want to reconstruct their past, but their lack of voice should not preclude the possibility of real economic control exercised by women in many spheres.⁵⁰

Reid's examination of prehistory Ganda women illustrates that even though we lack enough historical data in evaluation African women's history; Europeans could have overlooked their position in society. However, in analyzing the pre-colonial structure of East-African women, one finds that, women interacted with their societies, and environment, and became a visible force in the economic building structure of the Kingdom.

⁵⁰ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 89.

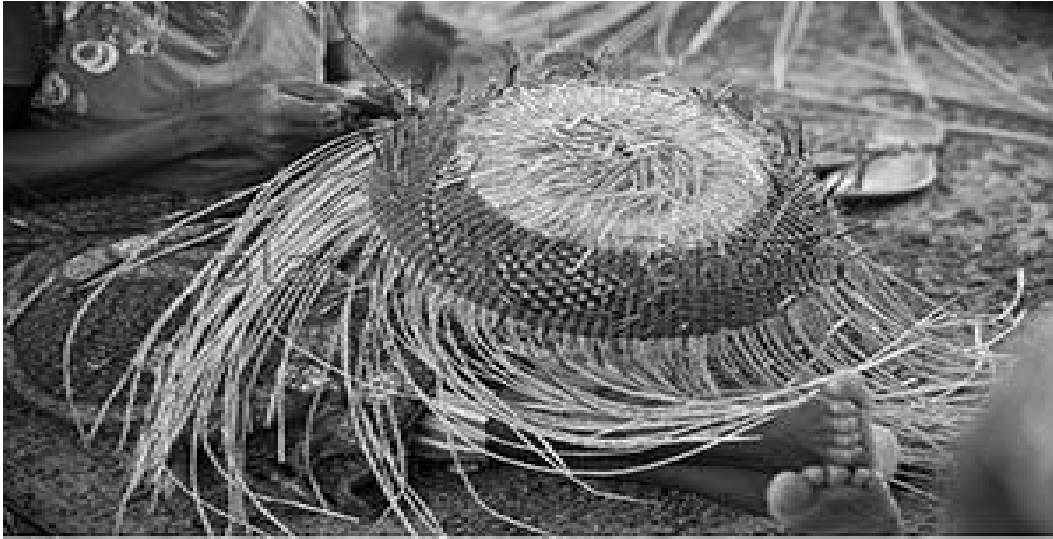


Figure 3. A woman weaving a basket in Uganda 21st century. Source: basketsofafrica.com

In addition to weaving and making beads, pottery making was also a highly distinct art that was practiced in several central and east Pre-colonial African societies. Throughout African societies pottery was mainly bracketed with female labor. According to Falola and Amponsab, pottery was associated with women because it was synonymous with women's homestead, child rearing, and agricultural activities.⁵¹ Products manufactured out of pottery functioned as vessels for drinking water, storing liquids, food, cooking, and tobacco pipes.⁵² Among the Ganda, pottery making was a highly specialized profession accompanied with perks and high status elevation in society. According to Reid, "potters in general enjoyed a privileged position in Ganda society; they were exempt from arbitrary arrest. The fruits of their labor were looked upon as symbolically as sources of economic growth."⁵³ Thus, it is clear that, Baganda women who participated and contributed to the

⁵¹ Falola and Amponsab, *Women's Roles in History: Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 124.

⁵² Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 87.

⁵³ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 88.

pottery making industry; enjoyed a prominent status in society, which afforded them lofty positions above common men and women. Pottery making enabled women to partake in domestic and long distance trading. This, in turn, accommodated them with economic autonomy and gave them trading power in the market place. Ganda women were able to set prices in the market economy and contributed to the economic forces of supply and demand. Contrary to Europeans calling women oppressed, Ogombo and Ogombo, argue that, “whoever controlled the productive forces and commercial exchange in society could hardly be called oppressed.”⁵⁴ The process of manufacturing pottery making was a notable both economically and culturally; it was superior in comparison to basket and weave making.⁵⁵ European explorers did not fact in the economic contributions of Ganda women. They interpreted women’s economic autonomy as symptoms of oppression and subordination by a male dominated society; and therefore, created the notion that men always oppressed women. At the eve of colonization economic autonomy was stripped away from women by British colonialists and entirely placed in the hands of men.

⁵⁴ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 433.

⁵⁵ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 88.



Figure 4. A 20th century Ugandan women dressed in barkcloth. Source: travelugandaguide.com

Barkcloth production also known as the *bakopi* line of business was the emblem of the Ganda kingdom throughout the nineteenth century. Not only did bark cloth manufacturing provide an added source of income to peasant households, but also clothes made out of barkcloth were worn throughout the Kingdom.⁵⁶ Materials made out of bark cloth were used during funerals, marriage, and celebratory rituals.⁵⁷ Additionally, bark cloth was also used for wrapping goods for transportation and bed linens.⁵⁸ In analyzing the significance of bark cloth, colonial administrator Hattersley noted that,

The barkcloth, the national garment of the Baganda, has also been found of value. There seems to be good spinning in its fiber and it can be dyed any color; it may be blocked into any form and sets any shape, and when cemented two thickness crossways it make a cloth of great strength.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 71.

⁵⁷ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 71.

⁵⁸ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 71.

⁵⁹ Hattersley, *The Baganda At Home*, 76.

Barkcloth was made from diverse types of fig trees found throughout the kingdom.⁶⁰ Both men and women worked in barkcloth production; while women took on the role of stripping the bark from trees, men manufactured the final products.⁶¹ Similar to pottery making producers of barkcloth enjoyed a prominent position in society.⁶² Women who contributed to bark cloth production enjoyed an elevated position alongside their male co-workers. Both women and men traded barkcloth within the local market and neighboring kingdoms of Bunyoro, karagwe and sogu.⁶³ Once again we see women actively participating in domestic and long distance trading, negotiating prices and highly contributing to the economy. This is clearly contrary to early European connotations of women as being docile, subservient, and lacking natural intellect compared to their male counterparts.⁶⁴ In analyzing the historiography of the Ganda women, one finds that women's contribution that the agricultural and domestic responsibilities functioned beyond the domestication of women by being an integral part of the overall success of economic wealth and prosperity of the Kingdom at large. During the colonial period, however, women lost most of their economic autonomy as colonial administrators transferred many of the agricultural in particular the cultivation of cash crop responsibilities to men. As explained by historian Catherine Conquery-Vidrovitch,

During early colonial period, the cultivation of new crops (peanuts, cotton, cocoa, coffee, etc.) was imposed on men. Men volunteered for this as soon as they realized that they could make a profit from it and thus were the first to

⁶⁰ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 70.

⁶¹ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 71.

⁶² Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 71.

⁶³ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 70.

⁶⁴ Hattersley, *The Baganda At Home*, 92.

benefit from the money-based economy. Women had to help their husbands as needed in keeping up the new plantations, In other words they worked harder without compensation.⁶⁵

In analyzing the historiography of women during colonial period, sources illustrate that women not only lost their economic autonomy but their political and social voices were castrated; as men gained access to more economic resources with the introduction of cash crops. Thus, African women were excluded from the international market while men highly gained tremendous economic power and highly benefitted from the trade.⁶⁶

Women and the Political Structure

The Ganda Kingdom emanated during the fifteenth century and was primarily comprised of about 50 clan heads with the *Kabaka* (King) as the ruling clan head.⁶⁷ The *kabaka* appointed different *batongole* (chiefs) to reign over different territories within the Kingdom, and to act as the King's agents in territorial and militaristic expansion.⁶⁸ Early explorers and missionaries including John Hanning Speke, Reverend John Roscoe and Grant who arrived in Buganda kingdom during the early nineteenth century were immensely dazzled by the highly bureaucratic socio-political organization of the Buganda Kingdom.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Catherine Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 59.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women In Sub-Saharan Africa* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 515.

⁶⁷ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 7.

⁶⁸ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 8.

⁶⁹ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 9.

Reverend Roscoe dotted in his journal that the Buganda Kingdom was the most progressive, superior, and cultured ethnic group compared to its neighboring Kingdoms.⁷⁰

This section of the paper examines the political structure of the Baganda women and how they implemented power in the Kingdom through indirect rule. According to Sheldon Kathleen, “despite women’s centrality to agricultural production, they generally had only indirect rule to access power and authority in African societies. Women advanced to leadership through elaborate systems of rank and naming.”⁷¹ The Ganda women were ranked in society according to social structural classifications. This enabled women to access social political power. Ganda women who had marital married to King were considered the highest social ranking in the community, so much so that, chiefs had to bow down before them. As explained by Reid,

The title *Kaddulubaale*, meaning the principal wife of a chief or the *Kabaka*, was clearly a more exalted position than that suggested by the term *muggya*, which could mean either second wife or a concubine. The words *muzaana* and *nvuma* both referred specifically to female slaves, although *muzaana* tended to describe a maidservant in the royal household or that of a chief.

The act of handing over a woman in return for a service or as the payment of a debt was expressed as *wumiriza*.⁷²

Thus, African women were not completely devoid of political voice, they secured their political existence through marital ties; as concubines, second wives, or mistresses. The king’s wives and concubines possessed greater rights in society over chiefs wives.

⁷⁰ Roscoe, *The Baganda Their Customs and Beliefs*, 7.

⁷¹ Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women In Sub-Saharan Africa*, 453.

⁷² Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 122.

According to Roscoe, “both men and women paid these ladies the greatest respect, even chiefs bowed low or kneeled when addressing princesses. The wives of chiefs would not kneel to a man of inferior position.”⁷³ A large possession of wives was equated to great wealth.⁷⁴ Unfortunately when, Europeans arrived in Africa the eighteenth century, the system of multiple wives gave them a cry for women’s liberation; they misinterpreted the marital system as one that oppressed women in a male dominated society.

Even though Ganda women did not hold positions of bureaucratic power, they formed social organizations to assert their political existence. The Baganda women formed organizations known to the local people as *olukiko*, in which they discussed social, political and economic issues. According to Ogombo and Ogbomo, “the role of individuals in the political process of any society may be defined in terms of their participation, direct or indirect, in the activities of the government and subgroups which exercise authority.”⁷⁵ The authors further contend that women in pre-colonial African societies had a tradition of practical participation in public affairs.”⁷⁶ Contrary to European claims that women did not have a political voice and that they were completely subjugated by men. Ganda women participated in social organizations, in which enabled them implemented social order. Women in pre-colonial African societies perceived that they would not practice direct political control within their communities as a result they exercised indirect rule. Women used their role as queen mothers to access political power. Queen held consultations offices where they discussed political, social and economic issues with elite members in society. In particular among the Ganda during the reign of King Suna his mother played a pivotal role

⁷³ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 8.

⁷⁴ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 122.

⁷⁵ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 434.

⁷⁶ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women and Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 434.

as queen mother. At the beginning of his reign King Suna would visit his mother for political consultation; by advising her son the queen exercised indirect political power over the Kingdom. As explained by Conquery-Vidrovitch,

We also know the important role played by the mother of the Ganda Kabaka. Muganzirwazza (ca. 1817-1882), one of the Kabaka Suna II's 148 wives, saw her son, Mutesa, among the youngest of the sixty-one competitors eligible, named to succeed his father, surely with her help, and contributed to his successful reign. Though he needed her help less and less, she retained an eminent position throughout his term.⁷⁷

Queen mothers were influential political forces in Kingdom; so much so that, their political power threatened the very existence of the *kabaka's* throne. In an attempt to reduce the political power of queen mothers; fearing that they would take direct political control of kingdom, princesses were forbidden to marry or bear children. In case a princess got pregnant she was supposed to give up the baby for adoption to a commoner. In most cases boys born to royal females in the matrilineal lineage were killed.⁷⁸ Coquery-Vidrotitch explains,

until the nineteenth century Ganda princesses were forbidden to marry. In a strictly patrilineal society, the *kabaka* (king) was wary of female royal blood that might lead to a male heir from the women's line. Princesses could not marry much less have children. When a princess was pregnant she had to abort or kill the newborn if she was unable to give to a commoner.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 39.

⁷⁸ Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 39.

⁷⁹ Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 36.

In spite of restrictions and policies implemented to control women's direct political rule, they found indirect outlets of asserting political power.

Marriage among the Ganda society was not a solely a male and female reunion, but also a sacred unification that functioned both a social and political alliance. Women in marital ties to the King or Chief including concubines brought about loyalty, efficiency, and were an instrumental tool as powerful civil servants. Marriage was not carried out as result of love but rather as a form of establishing strong social and political structure. Reid contents that, "If any Mkungu possessed of a pretty daughter committed an offense, he might give her to the King as a peace-offering; if any neighboring King had a pretty daughter, and the King of Uganda wanted her, she might also be demanded as a fitting tribute."⁸⁰ European explorers saw the act of offering women as gifts as a form of subjugation and control by men. Contrary to this promulgation, offering women as gifts was an act of diplomacy and attribute awarded to the king or chief of the strongest Kingdom. This practice established social and political alliances between kingdoms and within societies; it was meant to prevent civil turbulence and foster political and social order. Falola and Amponsab explain that, "without women entering into marital arrangements that brought groups and societies together, many of the major Kingdoms that emerged on the African continent probably would have disintegrated before they even started."⁸¹

Marital unions with important groups and neighboring kingdoms prevented political unrest; facilitated a tributary system, and contributed to the territorial expansion of the Ganda Kingdom. Falola and Amponsab assert that, "many researchers have attested

⁸⁰ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 121.

⁸¹ Falola and Amponsab, *Women's Roles in History: Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

to the fact that in Africa, south of the Sahara, many kingdoms, including the Buganda, secured their initial existence and expanded the creation of marital ties with other important groups.”⁸² It is also important to note that some women refused to be given away as gifts, in particular women with economic opportunities. Within the Ganda Kingdom, women were prone to run away from their husbands if they were mistreated; in this case the husband had to pay extra dowry or present a gift to the family if he was wrong in order to retain his wife.⁸³ Contrary to the colonial historical records that women were oppressed in society, women were not completely voiceless. By marrying into neighboring kingdoms, women helped expand the political power and influence of the Buganda Kingdom in the nineteenth century. This history runs contrary to what early explorers deemed as a system that subjugated women and subjected them to unfair male domination.

Early explorers overlooked the fact that women’s marital ties to neighboring kingdoms acted as form of diplomacy and political ties. Reid explains that, “Women could be acquired through warfare, as purchases or gifts or as part of an alliance or agreement between chiefs, or even be *kabaka (King)* and a particular chief.”⁸⁴ The act of offering women as gifts was essential in building political alliances, debt forgiveness and stopping wars; in such a way that women were both assets and sacred to society. In Uganda the King offered the *Wakungu* women he had captured in battle or women whose husbands owed service to the king.⁸⁵ According the *wanyamuezi* practice the women were not regarded as

⁸² Falola and Amponsab, *Women’s Roles in History: Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

⁸³ Roscoe, *The Baganda Their Customs and Beliefs*, 82-96.

⁸⁴ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 121.

⁸⁵ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 121.

property but rather sacred; they were essential in community building, fertility, child rearing, economic resources and held important positions in agriculture production.⁸⁶

Any man who came of age and decided not take wife was not respected in society; having a wife was important in the Ganda society, it was improper for a man to build a house without having a wife. As explained by Roscoe, “a young man did not build his house until after his marriage; if he had built it earlier he would have been asked whether he meant to take other women, and to live an improper life.” Thus women were an integral part of society, they were assets to both the husband and society, and were important in the social political structure of the Kingdom. Every man had a wife to run the homestead and plantations, and in the case of peasants; to engage in economic activities such as basket-weaving, iron, pottery and bark-cloth making. So much so that, a woman who raised her children with proper society mannerisms, ran a successful plantation and homestead, participated in social gatherings, and organizations brought much praise to her husband in society. However, colonization undermined and overlooked the political and social contributions of women in community building. They saw women’s social formations as a system of male dominance, and thus during colonization stripped women of political autonomy. Ogbomo and Ogbomo attest that,

While male historians have usually hailed centralization of authority within African societies as progress towards the state and Western-type organization, what they failed to understand is that it vastly strengthened patriarchy and, therefore caused a decline in the status of women.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda*, 121.

⁸⁷ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, “Women in Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede,” 436.

In analyzing the historiography of African women during colonial period, one finds that women lost both economic and political autonomy.⁸⁸ European colonialists did not incorporate women in their plans for colonial political and economic government.⁸⁹ As a result, women were often at the front line in lobbying for political autonomy and rallying against anti-colonial activities. In areas of eastern and southern Africa, women participated in newspaper writing, social, economic and political organizations, and fought for political admittance in government occupations.⁹⁰

Women and Social Structure

An individual's role in society is a secondary result of their social stratification within that society.⁹¹ This section examines the rights and duties of women in Pre-colonial Ganda society. In analyzing the social structure of women in Ganda society, one finds that women engaged in all sorts of social activities, ranging from traditional religious worship, funeral, birth, and marriage rituals. There were far more women than men in the Ganda society; more girls than boys were born.⁹² Therefore maintaining a highly social functioning order was crucial to the sociopolitical survival of the Kingdom. By engaging in social organizations and gatherings, women greatly influenced the social structure of the Ganda Kingdom. Historian Iris Berger and E. Francis White contend that,

⁸⁸ Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women In Sub-Saharan Africa*, 541.

⁸⁹ Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women In Sub-Saharan Africa*, 541

⁹⁰ Sheldon, *Historical Dictionary of Women In Sub-Saharan Africa*, 577.

⁹¹ Ogbomo and Ogbomo, "Women in Society in Pre-Colonial Iyede," 437.

⁹² Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79-88.

In centralized Kingdoms, queen mothers and members of royal families wielded significant power and authority. As healers, priestesses, and spirit mediums, other women directed life-cycle rituals and communal afflictions, while older women directed life cycle rituals for girls that helped to create cohesion in values and institutions. Village women helped solve community disputes and heal the sick.⁹³

Without the highly social stratification of women, the strength of the Ganda Kingdom during the eighteenth century would have weakened. Women's social stratification especially queen mothers helped maintain order within the Kingdom.

Women in Ganda society had the responsibilities of teaching girls the values of running a successful agricultural plantation, homestead and food supply; girls were taught to cultivate gardens at puberty.⁹⁴ Knowing when to control the demand for food during droughts and famine was paramount to the Society. Women were at the core of the success of the Ganda economy. They were responsible for running a happy household, cultivation of food throughout the Kingdom, engaging in domestic and long distance trading, in some cases, peasant families girls were responsible for herding cattle in the absence of male siblings.⁹⁵ It was the responsibility of the mothers, elderly, and queen mothers to raise girls in proper etiquette so that they would not disgrace the family name.⁹⁶ If a girl got pregnant before marriage, she would be a shame and her mother or guardian would be scorned by

⁹³ Iris Berger and E. Francis White, *Women In Sub-Saharan Africa: Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 24.

⁹⁴ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79.

⁹⁵ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79.

⁹⁶ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79-80.

society.⁹⁷ Marriage was one of the core social values deemed sacred in society; women were an integral part of the marital system. A good marriage would award the Kingdom with political allies, and awarded the family with economic opportunities.

Therefore, it was crucial that girls did not lose their virginity before exchanging marital vows. A girl who was a virgin on her wedding day afforded her family a lump sum dowry price and wealth at the time of her marriage. Dowry price ranged from cattle and/or other livestock, agricultural products, property and real estate. Any girl who lost her virginity before marriage not only humiliated her family name but also brought economic losses to her household. Clearly women were at the core of the social, political and economic structure of the Kingdom. The bride price system got a lot of backlash from early Europeans who deemed the practice as primitive and backwards. They failed to comprehend the socio-economic and political importance of dowry. Missionaries acquainted dowry price with the heathen way of life, through their lenses, these were people urgently in need of British colonial civilization. They misinterpreted the dowry system as one that afforded men the means to control and dominate women.

It was also the responsibility of the women to teach girls arts and crafts; ranging from basket weaving, pottery, and bark-cloth making, this way, the women kept the social structure classifications in the community. Roscoe explained that, "Girls seldom played games; they were kept busy for whole day, and were taught to make mats and baskets to occupy their leisure time; they also drew water and brought in firewood."⁹⁸ Among peasant families who lacked male offspring, girls were taught how to herd livestock.⁹⁹ Women took

⁹⁷ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79-80.

⁹⁸ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79.

⁹⁹ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 79.

on the responsibilities of nurses as well. During an illness of a family member it was the responsibility of the females in the household to take care and nurture of the sick back to health.¹⁰⁰ In most cases, if the illness got worse it was the responsibility of the main wife of the household to send for a healer. Yet women's social activities were overlooked by early explorers and missionaries. They considered most of these customs as primitive and barbaric. In analyzing the historiography of Pre-Colonial African women, one finds that women were an integral part of the social structure in society, without social structure organization fostered by women most of the African societies would not have expanded politically or functioned efficiently. Among the Ganda society women functioned as social workers for the King or Chief as explained by Roscoe,

In a large establishment there were not only many wives, but also girls who were destined later on to become wives of the chief, and further, there were women from the husband's clan, sisters or other elderly women, who acted as guardians to the girls until they were given in marriage. The King and the leading chiefs employed numbers of women to cultivate and cook for them, because their followers were entirely dependent upon them for food. And they had to entertain numbers of guests daily.¹⁰¹

Clearly, women in the Ganda society were at the very core of social structural function of the Kingdom; that is with their help the King or chief would run the Kingdom smoothly because women were in charge of the domestic activities. As explained by Falola and Amponsab,

¹⁰⁰ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 103.

¹⁰¹ Roscoe, *The Baganda: Their Customs and Beliefs*, 94.

Women's roles were not restricted to cementing political alliances or even that of producing heirs. They participated in almost everything, especially those that involved the basic essentials of everyday living such as farming, trading, child rearing, social entertaining, artistic production and distribution of religion, cultural transmission, socialization and many more.¹⁰²

During periods of abortion in cases of unwanted pregnancy or in the case the princesses had to abort a child, women participated in social ceremonies of protecting the blood of the aborted child. Such social practices were looked upon by missionaries as primitive and barbaric; that is to say that, missionaries misunderstood the concepts of social organizations practiced by women. Conquery-Vidrovitch explains,

The practice of guarding an aborted embryo drew a moralizing cry from missionaries, who understood nothing of women's social structures. Each woman took turns staying in the compound, to watch over the brood and prepare meals for the others who had gone to work in the fields. But missionaries pitied these poor children with so many mothers that they were no longer even capable of recognizing their own.¹⁰³

Colonial explorers and missionaries misunderstood the cultural, social customs and rituals practiced by women as primitive and barbaric. They concluded that the African continent as backgrounds and in need of European civilization and colonization.

¹⁰² Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 36.

¹⁰³ Conquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 36.

Conclusion

As European powers expanded within the African continent during the 1800s, the economic, political and social power of African women deteriorated. Women throughout the African continent found themselves in a disadvantaged position while the men gained exceptional access to economic opportunities with the new emergence of cash crops, and the international market¹⁰⁴. Contrary to the conventional wisdom and western belief that Colonization eradicated primitive and barbaric practices among the peoples of Africa, a closer examination reveals that women became oppressed, exploited, and subjugated, as they increasingly became more dependent on men for economic opportunities.¹⁰⁵

In 1894 when Uganda became a British protectorate, colonial administrators implemented customary laws and policies that excluded women from political representations and economic gains.¹⁰⁶ These laws also gave men, in particular, those in upper-class superiority over women in issues of marriage and divorce, thus women increasingly became men's property and second class citizens.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it did not come as a surprise, when women throughout the African continent formed organizations to oust and rally against European imperialism. During the nineteenth century, Ugandan Nyabingi priestesses Muhumusa and Kaigirwa waged a civil rebellion against British colonialists, which lasted from 1850 to 1950.¹⁰⁸ In 1911, Muhumusa made a public declaration that she would oust the British government out of Uganda.¹⁰⁹ Although Muhumusa and her

¹⁰⁴ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 509.

¹⁰⁵ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 509.

¹⁰⁶ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 509-520.

¹⁰⁷ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 532.

¹⁰⁸ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 566.

¹⁰⁹ Sheldon, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 566.

followers were unsuccessful, their political resistance was an emblem of women's subjugation and oppression under colonial rule.

Contrary to European promulgation that women occupied a repressive position in pre-colonial African society. It is evident that agricultural and domestic responsibilities assigned to women functioned beyond the domestication of women by being an integral part of the overall success of economic wealth and prosperity of the Ganda Kingdom. The historiographical analysis of African women illustrates that women aided in stimulating the economic, social, and political development of the prehistory Buganda, by taking the very roles that caused Europeans to reckon women as ineffectual and inconsequential.

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